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Conference Abstract

Coordinating Digitization and Trait Data Mobilization Across California Herbaria: The Importance of Resourced Support People

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Abstract

The California Phenology Network was a National Science Foundation-funded project that energized herbaria across California, U.S.A. to digitize and mobilize herbarium specimen data from 2018–2023. This community built their digitization workflows around a new, shared data commons: the Consortium of California Herbaria's "CCH2" Symbiota portal, which enabled the collections to efficiently share, transcribe, and georeference their specimen data across a distributed network, even during COVID-19-related shutdowns. As a result, the CCH2 portal now hosts 4.9 million occurrences, including 2.2 million images, for 90 collections, 53 of which continue to use CCH2 as their primary data management platform. The project also mobilized phenological trait data for 1.6 million records, creating a large dataset of flowering times across time and space. The success of this network is due to many factors, including active leadership, common but customizable workflows and protocols, a central data management platform, and robust community connections fostered by in-person meetings. In particular, we found that having a small, knowledgeable support team available to provide a personal gateway into a complicated data ecosystem, answer questions in a timely manner, troubleshoot, and do some of the tedious legwork (e.g., data preparation, adjustment of protocols,

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setting up software), helped to reduce barriers and maintain digitization momentum, especially as collection capacity varied across institutions. This model informed design of the Symbiota Support Hub, a small but currently well-resourced team that has greatly benefited the Symbiota user community. In this talk, we emphasize the finding that resourced, relatively lean teams of expert support people shared by a network of users can have an outsized impact on creating a sustainable open ecosystem of digital biodiversity data. We suggest that organizations explore ways of coordinating shared funding to provision such cross-network human resources in the future.

Keywords

biodiversity, data curation, data cleaning, community-building

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Conflicts of interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.